# Sparkle City

## The Spartanburg Pride Coalition Newsletter

## Edition 1: September 2026

### *Looking Pretty, Sparkle City!*

I am thrilled to present the first edition of the Spartanburg Pride Coalition's monthly newsletter! We will be bringing you news about progress toward creating Sparkle City Pride, announcements for events around town, and introductions to the people and organizations that make up the SPC. Newsletters will be coming to you on the last Sunday of each month, though the occasional special edition or announcement may come between regular publishing dates when we have something really exciting to share.

Our Coalition formed to bring Sparkle City Pride into being, but our other goal is to combine the resources and energy of all our separate organizations to become a force for the wellbeing and uplifting of queer folks and organizations in Spartanburg and the Upstate. We believe we are all stronger together, and that includes YOU.

I hope to see YOU at Pride, this year and for many years to come.

*--Rachel Coble, Secretary of the Board of Trustees*

### Who is the Spartanburg Pride Coalition?

We are an alliance of eight Spartanburg and Upstate organizations that proudly serve LGBTQ+ people in Spartanburg.

Our current member organizations are as follows:

**Fernwood Baptist Church:** Fernwood is an affirming Baptist Church. fernwoodchurch.org (864) 582-7467

**LGBTQ Theologies:** LGBTQ Theologies is a coalition of people of faith in the Upstate looking to address queer issues in the Upstate. https://www.lgbtqtheologies.org info@lgbtqtheologies.org

**PFLAG Spartanburg:** Our Spartanburg chapter of the Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays works to address queer issues in our county. https://pflagspartanburg.org (864) 381-8187.

**Proud Mary Theatre:** Proud Mary is Spartanburg's own queer theatre. https://proudmarytheatre.com info@proudmarytheatre.com.

**Piedmont Care:** Piedmont Care is an organization providing HIV and AIDS care, prevention, and advocacy in Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union. https://www.piedmontcare.org (864) 582-7773.

**Speaking Down Barriers:** SDB is a team of artists, speakers, and creatives who host events that provide opportunities for people of all kinds to speak across dividing lines. https://www.speakdownbarriers.org info@speakdownbarriers.org.

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Spartanburg:** UUCS is an affirming Unitarian church. https://uucs.org office@uucs.org.

**Uplift Outreach Center:** Uplift Outreach Center is an organization providing a safe and inclusive space for LGBTQ+ youth in Upstate South Carolina. https://upliftoutreachcenter.org (864) 381-7234

## *How Your Feedback Has Shaped Pride*

In March of 2026, the Spartanburg Pride Coalition sent out a community survey asking for input on how you folks want our Pride Festival to look. The decisions SPC has made so far, everything from Pride's date and location to small details like t-shirt designs and performance schedules, have been influenced by the results of that survey and feedback on our social media pages.

The drive to create evidence-based Pride is not only the result of us being nerds. After a few years of confusing, inaccessible, and/or dissapointing Pride events hosted by a previous organization, we want our first Pride to meet your needs as best as we can manage.

We received 114 responses to that survey, all filled with good ideas, wonderful memories, and valuable input about Pride in previous years. Let's dig into how those answers have influenced decisions SPC has made about Sparkle City Pride!

**Board of Trustees of the Spartanburg Pride Coalition**

**President:** Ada Bradley, Uplift Outreach Center
**Vice President:** Anne Garner, Unitarian Universalist Church of Spartanburg and LGBTQ Theologies
**Treasurer:** Sally McClellan, Proud Mary Theatre and Unitarian Universalist Church of Spartanburg
**Secretary:** Rachel Coble, Unitarian Universalist Church of Spartanburg
**Member at Large:** Raymond Velazquez-Turner, Uplift Outreach Center
**Member at Large:** Becki Roberts, community organizer
**Member at Large:** Tracey Jackson, Piedmont Care

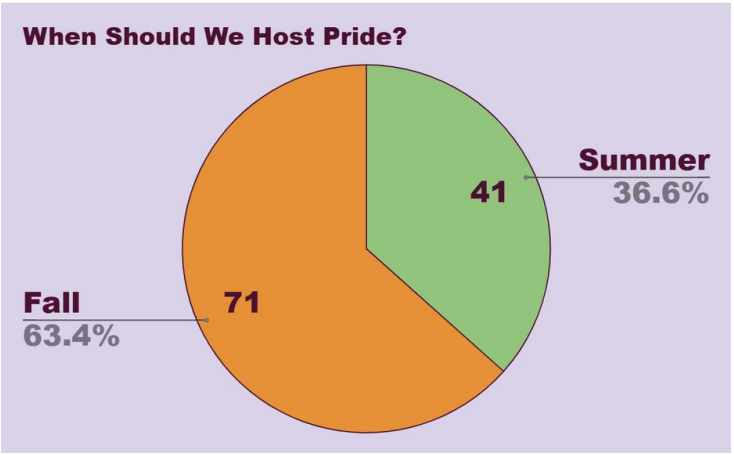
*Contact the SPC any time at spartanburgpride@protonmail.com!*

## Fall, Y'all

The first question the survey asked was a simple one: Summer Pride or Fall Pride? Spartanburg has seen both over the years and both seasons have their strengths and weaknesses. The answers to this question were skewed to Fall, with 71 respondents preferring an Fall Pride and 41 preferring a Summer Pride. That made Fall Pride an easy choice to make!

We also knew from feedback we had received that the community wants a date it can count on, not one that changes every year. We thought long and hard about exactly when in the Fall to set the date. Many good ideas were brought up, but we settled on the first Saturday in November. Why early November? There were a few reasons:

1. We will have absolutely beaten the heat by then.
2. Early November is safely removed from all major autumnal holidays and big local festivals, meaning fewer people will have to choose between Pride and another event or celebration.
3. It doesn't clash with local school schedules either!
4. Setting the date so close to the election has, in past years, encouraged local candidates to appear and hear what we have to say.



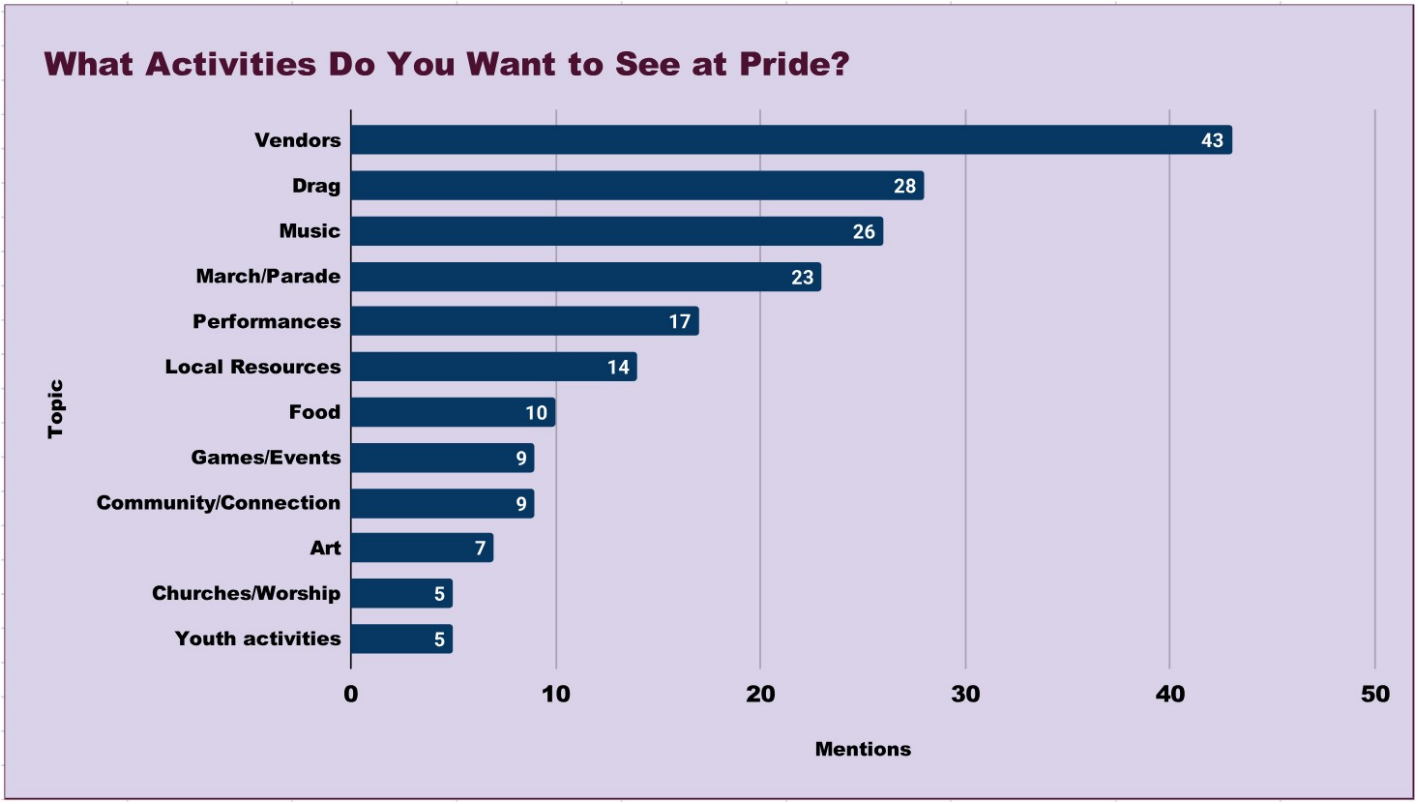

We wanted Sparkle City Pride to be an easy commitment: no major conflicts on the calendar, no thunderstorms or summer heat.

*How Your Feedback Has Shaped Pride (continued)*

## I Don't Know, What Do You Want To Do?

We knew what we were asking for when we put a fill-in-the-blank line following the question "What Activities are you most interested in seeing at Spartanburg Pride?" and we got exactly what we were asking for. Even condensing the responses into categories took some time and work, and quite a few respondents listed more than one category.

Here are the 12 most common activities (or other things) mentioned in response to that question, sorted into broad best-fit categories:




It may not feel like that much, but planning for, paying for, organizing, and staffing twelve things can be a lot. In our first year, we won't have perfect delivery on all these items, but let's talk now about a few points in this data that made us change our minds about our previous plans:

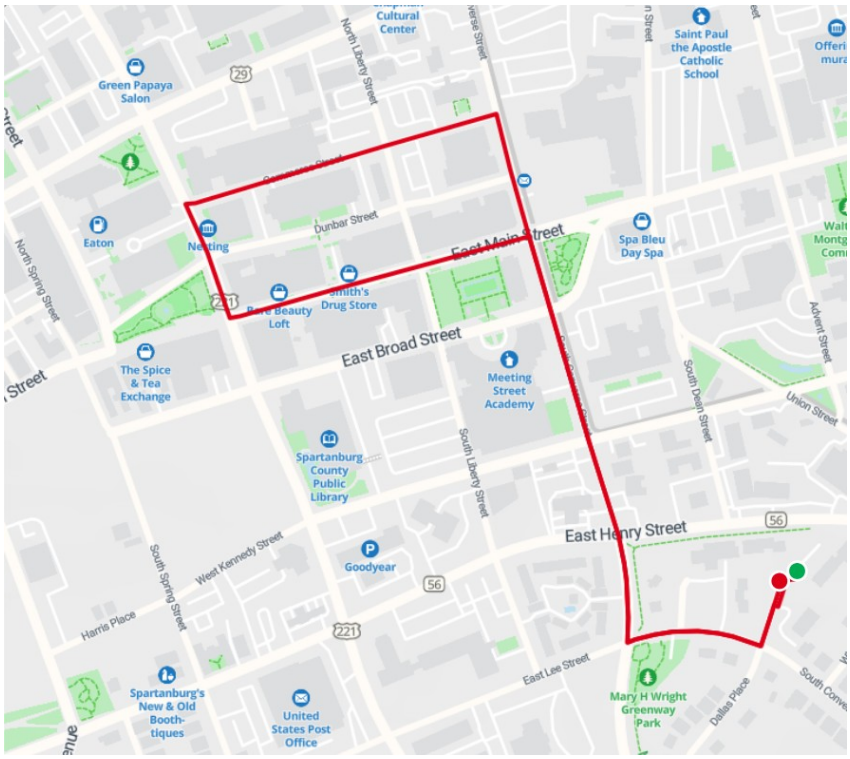
**Local Vendors and Resources:** Y'all said local, local, local, and local it is. We are going to be limited in our space for vendors, but the plan has been set for who is getting table space: local resources and nonprofits first, then local, queer-owned businesses and artisans second. That will probably fill up the space we have got (and which isn't earmarked for sponsor space), but we are going to make the most of what we have to deliver what you want.

**Drag and Music:** In one meeting, it was asked how much drag we want. The response to that was 'the survey says a lot.' We hear and we are pleased. Our own Proud Mary Theatre is planning a slate of entertainment for the whole venue, including local musicians and theatre performances, speakers, and big D Drag Artists, including the much-requested Patty O'Furniture! We are BEYOND thrilled to announce that Patty has graciously agreed to be our hostess for Sparkle City Pride.

*How Your Feedback Has Shaped Pride (continued)*

**A March:** Whether the term you used was 'march' or 'parade', you are getting it. Planning for a march has taken a significant amount of our funding and organizing, as it involves a lot of discussion with the city, permits, and paying for (required) security, but y'all made it clear it was non-negotiable. Wear your boots, because we're taking this outside.

Those of you who requested a visible, public march are getting your wish: we are officially taking this to Main Street. Here is the march route we have set with the city: it's a long one, but a good one.




**One L Taken:** Speaking of city permits, one thing that proved too much of a hurdle to tackle on our first year was a liqour liscence. Food permits are in the works, but y'all will have to to go see our friends at the Beerded Cork Taproom (or Ciclops... we hope?) after the festivities are done for your nightcap.

We asked two more questions on the survey: 'What improvements would you like to see made for the Spartanburg Pride Festival', and 'What are your favorite memories of previous festivals in Spartanburg or other locations?' I will be saving a proper analysis of the responses to these two questions for next month, but as a preview, the requests for accessibility, better communication, and staying local have been happily noted.

## In Other Words

It feels a little silly to talk about 'the community' and 'the coalition' like there's any difference. It's a queer Spartanburger writing this. But one thing we keep talking about is that there is a way that Pride has been done, but that isn't the way it has to be done.

If what we really want as a queer community in Spartanburg is something different than what we have been getting, something more grassroots, something less commercial, something that feels more like home, then we're willing to take the chance at making something different to have what we really want. In my mind, it's finally time for Spartanburg Pride to transition into its new self.

This is the SPC's first year acting as host and the time crunch forced us to have to say no to some things we knew we did want, like food trucks and vast parking lots. We want to do Sparkle City Pride right, and we have chosen to say 'no' to anything we can't do well while we pour our hearts into everything we say 'yes' to.

If you have any more ideas for Pride or if you want to volunteer to help, reach out to us any time at spartanburgpride@protonmail.com. You are all invited to our Monthly Mingles as well! The next date is September 12, 12:00-2:00, at the Beerded Cork Taproom. Members of the Pride Coalition are always there and always listening (in a good way).

## *Meet our Member Organizations*

We're going to take some time in the first few editions of Sparkle City to introduce our readers to the member committees of the Spartanburg Pride Coalition. We want everyone to know where we're living loud and proud and where you can go if you need us. First up to bat in this edition are the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spartanburg and Piedmont Care.

### Unitarian Universalist Church of Spartanburg

UUCS is Spartanburg's chapter of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Unitarianism is an open-minded religion that encourages seekers to find their own spiritual path. Our goal is to worship together without the burden of having to all believe the same thing.

UUCS planned and hosted the Upstate's very first Pride in 2009! After earning the official designation of being a 'welcoming congregation' for LGBTQ+ people, UUCS wanted to do more. What was initially a joke about hosting Spartanburg's first Price became a challenge and then a mission.

Services take place every Sunday at 11:00 at 210 E Henry Place and are livestreamed simultaneously to the Church's Youtube channel, but the Church hosts events every day of the week. Check out our calendar to learn more and join the fun!

To highlight some of our many upcoming events:

**Worship:** Every Sunday at 11:00 AM!
**Progressive Christian Services:** We host a progressive Christian service once monthly as a joint project with the United Church of Christ. The next Progressive Christian Service will take place in the Sanctuary on September 6 at 4:00 PM!
**Humanist Meetings:** We host meetings for local humanists once monthly. Humanism is the belief in the power of humans and is often though not always an atheist belief. The next meeting is scheduled for September 9 at 7:00 PM in the Fellowship Hall.
**Pagan Circles:** All witches, pagans, and interested parties are welcome to our pagan celebrations! Our Mabon circle will take place at 6:30 PM on Wednesday, September 30 on the back lawn.

### Piedmont Care

Founded in 1994, Piedmont Care is a nonprofit 501c3 organization providing HIV and AIDS care, prevention, and advocacy in Spartanburg, Cherokee, and Union counties of South Carolina. We provide targeted education, free and confidential HIV testing, medical care, and a broad range of comprehensive services to individuals who are living with or at-risk for HIV.

Piedmont Care was founded at a time when the world was in dire need of dedicated support for those living with HIV and AIDS. It was a daybreak in an era marked by the darkness of stigma and fear. From its inception, Piedmont Care has been a guiding light, offering vital services such as case management, medical care, prevention, counseling, and support programs. Our commitment to providing comprehensive care has helped many navigate the complexities of living with HIV, transforming the darkness of uncertainty into a dawn of promise and resilience.

September Events:

**Free HIV Testing Event** in observance of National HIV/AIDS and Aging Awareness Day:
Thursday, September 17, 8:30am-5pm
**Free HIV Testing Event** in observance of National Gay Men's HIV/AIDS Awareness Day:
Thursday, September 24, 8:30am-7pm

Walk-ins welcome; appointments encouraged. Call to schedule: 864-582-7773 or email loree@piedmontcare.org
Piedmont Care, 101 N. Pine Street, Suite 200, Downtown Spartanburg
Loree Bishop, CSE (she/her/hers)

## *Where We've Been*

The Pride Coalition is already out; why not be about, too? Here are some events we've hosted or attended recently!

### August Mingle, Beerded Cork Taproom

We had a great time at our August Mingle on Saturday, August 8! The folks at Proud Mary previewed two songs from their upcoming original musical, the Book of Merman. Thank you to Proud Mary. Our count was about 40 people came just to hang out and spend time with the community. A HUGE thank you as always to the staff of the Beerded Cork for hosting us with pride and giving us such a warm welcome. We hope to see all of you again in September!

Proud Mary actors Gwen Stembridge, Dexter Simmons, and Mark Eisenbrey perform. Photo by Danny Anderson.

Local organizers confer at the August Mingle at the Beerded Cork Taproom. Photo by Davelyn Hill.

SPC's booth at the USC Upstate event. SPC member Rachel Coble is standing behind a rather pink booth, mostly set up by SPC member Becki Roberts. Love you Becki!

### USC Meet and Greet, USC Upstate Campus

Representatives Becki Roberts and Rachel Coble joined our friends and allies to welcome new students to the Upstate on Monday, August 17! Speaking for myself, it's been sometime since I've been on a college campus, and it was heartwarming to see how readily a Pride-focused group is accepted now. One young person told us that they had just come out to their parents the day before, and to that we say CONGRATULATIONS! Thank you to USC Upstate for welcoming us in!

## *Upcoming Community Events*

**Sept 12: Monthly Mingle.** SPC's next Second-Saturday Monthly Mingle will take place on September 12, 2026, from 12:00 - 2:00 PM at the Beerded Cork, 2601 E. Main St Spartanburg, SC 29307. These Monthly Mingles are opportunities for the community to get together, get to know each other, and support each other. We also welcome feedback about Sparkle City Pride! Members of the Spartanburg Pride Coalition attend each event and are always eager to hear more about what y'all want to do and see here in Sparkle City.

**Sept 16: Rainbow Reads.** The Rainbow Reads book club meets at Hub City Books (186 W Main Street, Spartanburg, SC 29306) every third Wednesday at 6:00 PM! The next meeting will be September 16th and they will be discussing Gideon the Ninth by Tamsyn Muir. Even if you haven't read the book the book club will be happy to chat, have fun, and recommend some good reads.

**Nov. 7: PRIDE!** Sparkle City Pride is set for NOVEMBER 7, 2026, 11:00 - 4:00, starting with a March at 11:00.

If you run a LGBTQ+ club, organization, or social gathering in Spartanburg and want your event to be put in the next newsletter, send us a message to spartanburgpride@protonmail.com! Keep in mind that anything we publish here will be publicly accessible online.